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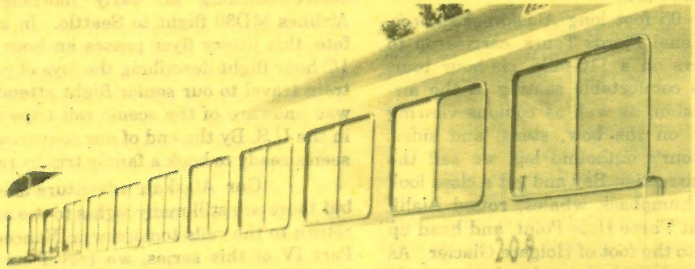

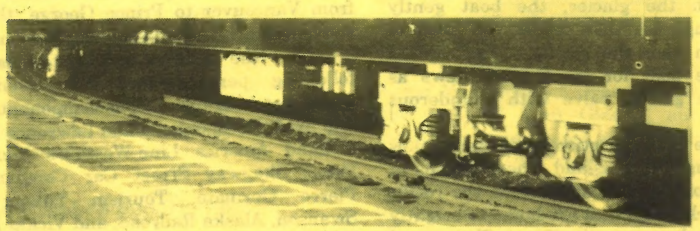

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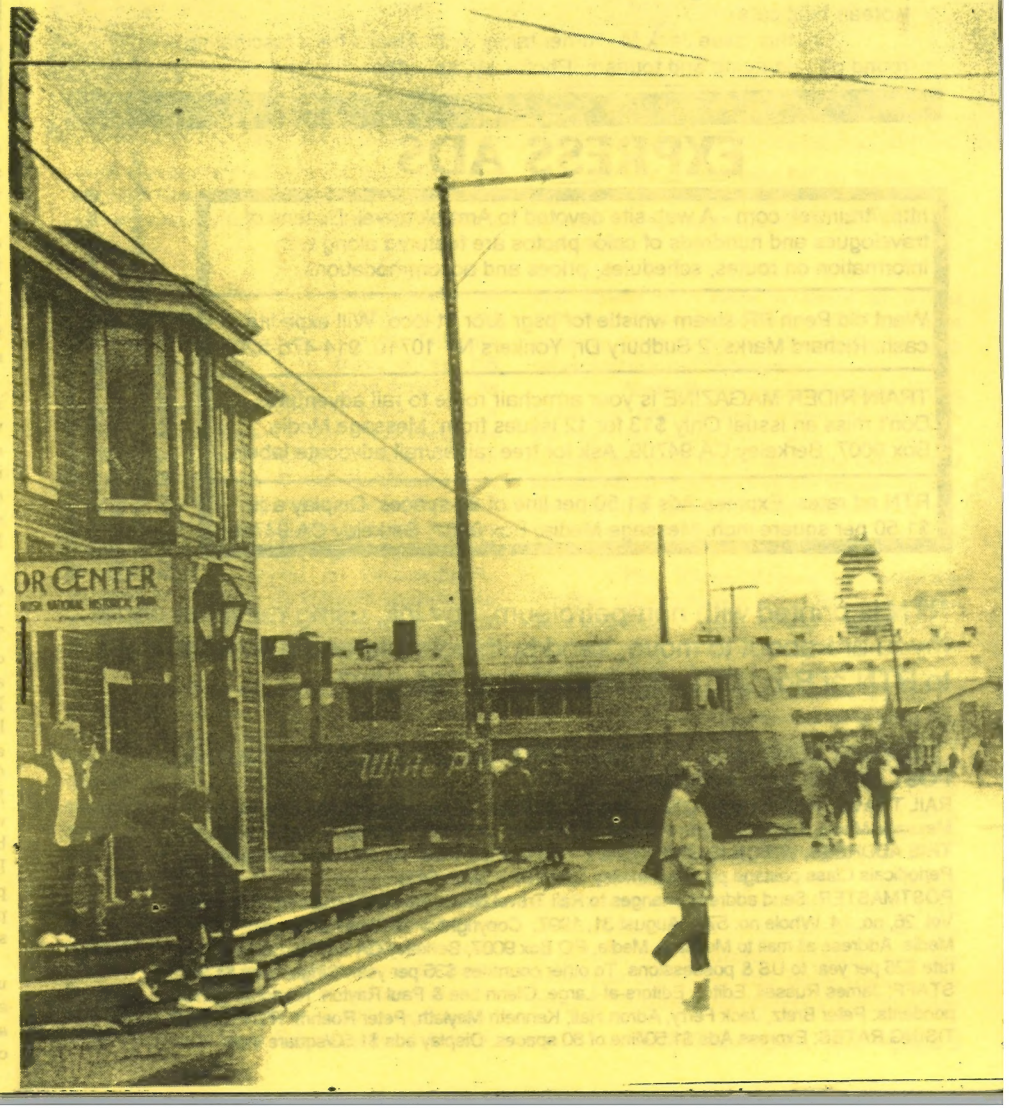
RAIL TRAVEL NEWS



ON THE COVER

(Front cover:) A White Pass & Yukon Route excursion train crosses Broadway, the main street in Skagway, Alaska, alongside the town's visitor center, on June 12, 1997. At the end of the street is visible Holland America Line's ship "Veendam".

(Rear cover, upper:) A Skagway Street Car Company vehicle, built in the 1930s for use in Yellowstone National Park, takes visitors on narrated tours of Skagway. These vehicles were featured in many railroad timetables in pre-Amtrak days.

(Rear cover, lower:) This modern Alaska Railroad coach used in Fairbanks to Anchorage service is a duplicate of the coach ridden by the author from Anchorage to Seward. Note the extra-large windows in these Korean-built cars.

In this issue Jack M. Turner takes us to Alaska for a fascinating round of train riding and tourism. Photos by the author.

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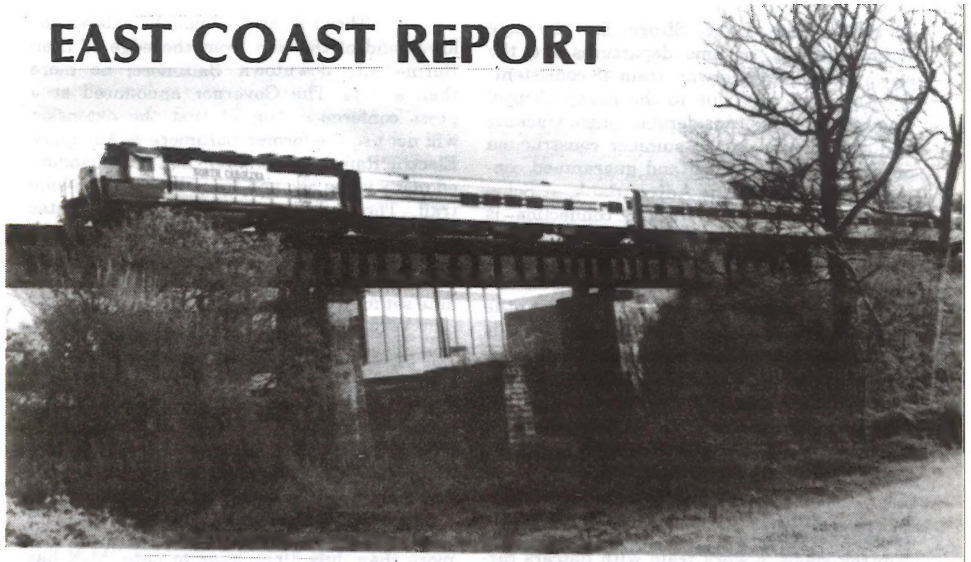
EAST COAST REPORT



North Carolina DOT's **Piedmont** train rolls across the Haw River at Graham NC on April 21, 1996, en route from Raleigh to Charlotte. The location is four miles east of Burlington NC on Norfolk Southern's former Southern Railway secondary line between Raleigh and Greensboro NC. Photo by Alex Mayes.

A Norfolk Southern local freight at Greensboro NC on July 19 derailed one car while switching. The car fell onto mainline track no. 1 in front of an NS intermodal train, which hit it and derailed. Its cars jackknifed and blocked track 2. As a result, Amtrak train 74, the **Piedmont**, was held at High Point NC at its scheduled 7:02pm arrival time. Amtrak 79, the **Carolinian**, was held just outside Greensboro yard. When the mess was cleared, no. 79 was released first (at 10:04pm), followed by three NS freights. After these four trains cleared, no. 74 was finally released at 11:31pm. Passengers transferring to the **Silver Star** at Raleigh were taken off no. 74 and given taxicab transfers to make the connection.

Amtrak schedule revisions on the Empire Service that were to have taken effect in August were moved up to July 14. Wes Coates, Empire Service Manager, relased a bulletin on July 8 with the schedule changes, caused by Metro-North beginning the second stage of its major trackwork project for this summer on the Hudson Line between Yonkers and Poughkeepsie. M-N was replacing wooden ties on the northbound track with concrete ties, and the work was anticipated to continue through Aug 14. The project forced Amtrak and M-N trains to use a single track between Garrison and Beacon, and at reduced speeds. The schedule of Amtrak train 246 was changes to let the train leave Schenectady at 6:40am and Albany at 7:10am to arrive in NY at 9:20am, so to minimize the impact of that train running through the construction area with other Amtrak and M-N trains.

Metroliner consists in July shrank to six cars: four coaches, dinette and club service car. No notification was done on the change, not even to the operating crews, as it did not affect crew sizes on the trains—in contrast to the publicity that surrounded the increase of consists to seven cars a couple of years ago.

The Three Rivers had schedule changes effective July 27, announced three days in advance. Train 40 was slowed by one hour, 10mins, arriving in NY at 7:25pm instead of 6:15. Train 41 was slowed an hour, reaching Chicago at 8:50am instead of 7:50.

Amtrak announced in a press release Aug 28 that there would be 83 more cars available for NE Corridor service and 32 for Empire Service for Labor Day travel (Labor Day weekend was Aug 30-Sep 1). Three extra trains were also announced—one NY-Albany, one NY-Philadelphia and one Wash-NY.

Timekeeping on the eastbound **Lake Shore Ltd** has lately deteriorated. With the increasingly and chronically late operation of train 6, the **California Zephyr**, and the somewhat better but still tardy train 8, the **Empire Builder**, and Amtrak's current policy

of holding the **Lake Shore** for the late Western trains, on-time departures are the exception. Once underway, train 48 consistently loses more time due to the heavy Conrail freight traffic and considerable single-tracking and slow orders due to summer construction on the line. The normal and guaranteed connection to train 69, the **Adirondack**, at Schenectady, normally about a 2-hr connection, is missed more than half the time now. (Amtrak has said that a possible alternative is to have Montreal passengers remain aboard, transferring to train 448 if need be, and connect to the **Vermonter** at Springfield. The problem is that this is even a closer connection than the **Adirondack**!)

With the coach-only status of the **Three Rivers**, complaints from sleeping car passengers made the use of that train an unpopular alternate for NY-bound riders.

An East Coast Amtrak passenger on Aug 29 saw at Wilmington DE, near the Amtrak shops, a work train with flatcars carrying track materials and powered by Turboliner power cars! These had last been reported in storage at Bear DE shops. If it runs, it can be used as a locomotive!

The Carolinian, Amtrak train 79, has some enhancements to Custom Class. Videos are now shown in Carolina Club, which is actually Custom Class, not Club, upon leaving New York. Previously they had been shown south of Washington only. The car now has its own attendant, who assigns seats using a "Welcome aboard. Your seat is..." card. A pillow and headset are complimentary and offered to all Custom Class passengers.

●●●

Baltimore light rail update: the north end of the line will officially open Sep 9, with Gov. Parris Glendenning and other officials cutting the ribbon at 10am, and then public service will commence. The ceremony will be followed by festivities including food and information. The location will be the Hunt Valley station, the end of the line. Hunt Valley is a major industrial area with thousands of jobs, hotels and a shopping mall. It should generate quite a bit of traffic.

Other additions: The spur into Penn Station is completed, while the line into the airport is not. The latter is linked to completion of a new international terminal this fall, where the station will be located. No dates have been set yet. The plan is for one set of equipment to run airport-Penn Station and the other Hunt Valley-Cromwell. There is not enough equipment on hand to do the double service.

There is also a plan to extend the lower end of the line from the edge of Glen Burnie into downtown Baltimore, no more than a mile. The Governor announced at a press conference Aug 21 that the extension will not use the former Baltimore & Annapolis Electric Railway alignment that was abandoned many years ago and turned into a hike-bike trail. There are two other possible routes under consideration: one is mostly through business rather than residential areas. No decision has been made on that yet, and no date set for a decision to be announced.

According to the original construction schedule, at least the Hunt Valley and Penn Station legs were supposed to be open by now.

—Ken Maylath.

Metro-North announced that its preliminary Ridership and Revenue report for July showed that it took in $25,053,521 or 1% more than its budget target, and 3.4% more than in July 1996. It provided 5,398,974 rides or 0.6% more than its budget target and 1.9% more than July 1996. Year to date, M-N has taken in $168,875,755, which is 1.3% over its budget target and 3.8% more than the same time period last year, and it has provided some 36,074,725 rides (0.5% more than its budget target and 1.9% more than the same period in 1996).

Metro-North's on-time performance for the week ended Aug 24 was Hudson Line 95%, Harlem Line 97.5%, New Haven Line 96.2% and systemwide 96.4%. Year to date, systemwide is 96.5%, exactly what its goal called for!

Starting Aug 25 and continuing for about five weeks, M-N customers boarding northbound trains on the Hudson Line at stations from Riverdale to Ossining between 3:50pm and midnight must use the NY-bound platform, while southbound customers must board from the Poughkeepsie-bound platform. This "left-handing" arrangment is to accommodate the installation of concrete ties between Tarrytown and Croton-Harmon.

M-N's next Harmon Open House will be on Saturday, Oct 18.

●●●

State of Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board said Aug 21 that it had received "many, many letters of complaint" about CSX's role in delaying Virginia Railway Express trains this summer. The delays were results of the July 8 wreck involving a CSX freight train and an Amtrak train. The CTB scolded CSX for causing schedule havoc for VRE. A CSX spokesman responded that the railroad will do everything it can to help VRE regain lost ridership. A VRE spokesman indicated that CSX would have to improve the on-time performance of VRE if it is really to help.

The Sunset Limited in Aug had its Eastern terminus changed from Sanford FL to Orlando, and a stop in Winter Park FL was also restored. Also, the train's schedule between San Antonio and Jacksonville was revised, including a reduction in dwell time at New Orleans from three hours to one hour. (The westbound train now uses ex-MP tracks from Beaumont to Houston. UP has instituted bi-directional flows in that area, running eastbounds on the ex-SP and westbounds on the ex-MP.) Amtrak said all this was done to improve the train's financial performance.

A stone pier of Conrail's Rockville bridge across the Susquehanna River on Aug 19 collapsed under an eastbound Conrail unit coal train. Four CSX hopper cars of coal fell into the river at a spot where the river is five feet deep. A fuel pipeline crossing the river on the bridge was ruptured, and the city of Harrisburg PA which gets is drinking water from the river, shut down the water system intakes. Photos showed the stonework under the southernmost track had collapsed, and the earthenwork beneath the roadbed then caved in. No locomotives derailed, and there was no injury.

The bridge is the world's longest stone arch bridge, built by the PRR in 1902. Conrail said the line would be shut down at least 24 hours. The **Pennsylvanian** and **Three Rivers** and about 60 freights use the bridge daily. But Amtrak did not miss a trip over the bridge; it used the remaining two tracks. The damaged section will be rebuilt.

Westbound Capitol Ltd effective Sep 2 was given a minor schedule adjustment. It now arrives in Chicago at 9:10am instead of 8:50. Since all other times up and and including Hammond-Whiting IN are unchanged, the change is to allow time to drop off mail and express cars from the train in Chicago before arriving into the station. Since this is a through operation to train 3, the **Southwest Chief**, the removal of mail cars cannot be done after the train is in the station.

The Plattsburg NY Bombardier plant is being doubled in size, to be completed in Feb. This is to handle two large pending orders—the Amtrak American Flyer High Speed Train and the order of 680 subway cars for New York City.

SEPTA schedule change for Aug 31 has R2 Regional Rail commuter service extended from Wilmington to Newark DE. This is a 15-min run, and it happens four times in the morning rush and three times in the evening commute hours on weekdays.

Virginia Railway Express will change schedules Sep 8 to improve on-time performance, on 16 of its 26 daily runs. The VRE board approved a 1999 budget plan that projects an increase of 1250 riders daily to 8300 between now and June 1999, and anticipates that revenues will increase from $7.7 million to $8.7 million. On Aug 28 CSX's Paul Reistrup issued an open letter of apology to VRE commuters for disrupted schedules following the CSX wreck of July 8 near Crystal city

LATE NEWS ITEMS

The Canadian derailment—more info (see pp. 6 & 20): The eastbd train was running on time at 1:50am on Sep 3 when it derailed on a straight, flat stretch of prairie track. The one fatality was a passenger from Brooklyn, Diana Kaplan, 56. Her husband and 12 others were hospitalized. The two engines and all but the last six cars derailed. There was reportedly major damage to all three coaches, the diner and the first Skyline car. Reportedly the cause of the derailment was the second engine, which suffered an axle failure: one axle on the engine had just been changed, and two on-line warnings about an overheated axle were ignored. As a result, two workers who had been involved were suspended by VIA.

Congress is back in session. NARP said its top priorities remain getting the Senate Amtrak operating figures into the appropriations conference process and getting a reauthorization bill passed so that Amtrak can get the $2.3 billion that's in the budget agreement. Congress wants to pass its appropriations bills by the end of September.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee unveiled Sep 4 an ISTEA renewal bill, called BESTEA ("Building Efficient Surface Transportation and Equity Act"). NARP said it does not give states the flexibility to invest in passenger rail. Also, it proposes spending greatly in excess of that proposed in the recent budget agreement.

The FRA issued a safety advisory Sep 4 to all Class 4 or higher railroads and all those with passenger trains. The lines must get Weather Service flash flood warnings out to dispatchers within 15mins. Train speeds must be limited in affected areas, and special inspections must be made on bridges subject to flash flood damage. The advisory takes effect in 60 days.

RAIL CANADA

The eastbound Canadian derailed early on Sep 3 six miles west of Biggar, Saskatchewan, about 60 miles west of Saskatoon. The train was traveling on a straight section of track in flat territory. There was no immediate indication of a cause for the wreck, in which the locomotives and 13 of the 19 cars derailed. There was one fatality and about 65 injuries, mostly minor. It was not known whether the fatally injured person was a passenger or crew person. The train was carrying a large number of foreign tourists. The load was reported as 193 passengers and 29 crew. A Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman reported that the cars were "all mangled up" and that heavy machinery was being used to open them up and look for occupants. Injured passengers were taken to local hospitals and others put up in hotels.

Canadian National wants to sell its 500-km line between Moncton and Mont Joli along the northeastern coast of New Brunswick to a short-line operator. CN said the route is not losing money, but that a short-line operator could run it more efficiently while CN concentrates on its "core network". CN was taking bids until Aug 29 on the line. The railway said that the proposed sale is part of its 3-year plan to eliminate 9600 km of track. VIA Rail currently uses the line, and will have to negotiate with any new owner to maintain its passenger service there.

Former transport minister Doug Young has been appointed chairman of Maritime Road Development Corp.

The privatization of the Port of Churchill has passed its final hurdle, according to an Aug 14 report. In addition, the transfer of the Churchill-The Pas and Lynn Lake-The Pas lines to Denver-based OmniTrax has been approved. The latter has agreed to invest $50 million in the lines to make them economically viable. The Canadian government is subsidizing the sale of the lines. The federal and provincial governments will invest $50 million to improve the Port of Churchill.

MIDWEST REPORT

The Cleveland RTA on Aug 24 made improvements to a number of bus lines. Said general manager Ronald Tober, "RTA is build-ing on our progress. In the last few years we have made capital improvements with reno-vating our rail stations, and we have invested in projects like our 'Walkway to Gateway' and the Waterfront Line, that link us closer with our communities. With this first round of COA [Comprehensive Operational Analysis]-based service improvements we are taking the next logical step—refining and tailoring our serv-ices to truly meet the way people use public transit now, and will use it in the future".

CSX said that its installation of new rail on its main line in NE Indiana (between Albion and Auburn and the Indiana-Ohio state line) is almost finished (as of Aug 28). The aim of the project was to put in place a high-capacity double track between Chicago and the East Coast.

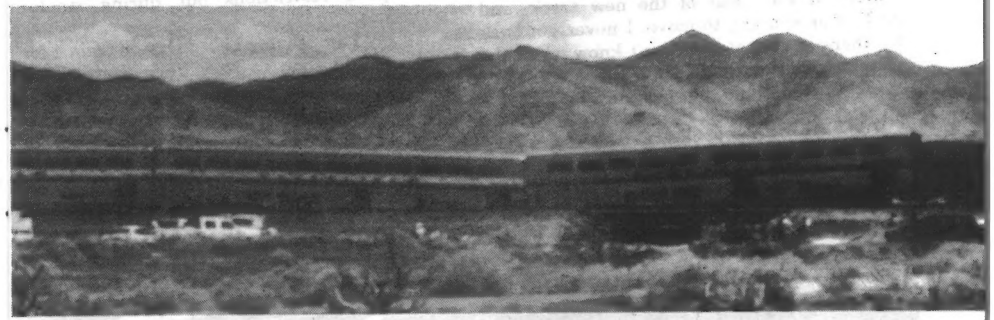
General Motors wants to see a rail commuter service between Lansing and Detroit MI, using the Grand Trunk route via Durand and Pontiac. A state legislator also is proposing such a service. GM will move 1200 workers from Lansing to Detroit by Dec 1998, and would like to see commuter transportation for them so some could continue to live in Lansing. Officials in Lansing agree, as these people are high-paid employees who have strong ties to the community. GM hopes to use revenues from downtown Detroit casinos to fund the train.

RailAmerica Inc. has (as of Aug 22) purchased a second Minnesota railroad from BNSF. A line near Hinckley MN, running 33.3 miles north from North Branch to Hinckley and 11.1 miles west from Brook Park to Mora, north of Minneapolis. The operation will be called the St. Croix Valley Railroad Company.. The company took over the line Sep 1. The line handles grains and flour and intermodal traffic. Further information about RailAmerica can be obtained from the organization's Web site at www.railamerica.com.

The demise of the Tennessee Pass line in Colorado (see last issue) has placed all coal trains on the Moffat Line of the UP, with its limited number of sidings, adversely affecting on-time performance of the **California Zephyr**. And the Glenwood Springs trip of the Ski Train Aug 24 did not arrive in Denver until after midnight due to freight congestion. "One crew reportedly took 12 hours to go from Denver to Rollinsville" said an observer. Some of the delays are due to reconstruction of the ex-SP main line west of Salt Lake City,

The Day the Southwest Chief Derailed

By Robert H. Heuerman of Kingman, Arizona



Notice the sleeping car straddling the damaged bridge in this photo of the Aug 9 derailment of Amtrak train 4 near Kingman AZ, taken by the author.

I would like to share what my day was like on Aug 9. In the summer I usually wake up about 6am, but that morning sirens galore did the honors. First thought: a big wreck on I-40. I turned on the scanner and heard conversation concerning "Walapai" and "second level". We have a Hualapai Road that has several new apartment complexes, so with the rain we had that night, I figured maybe a second floor to one of those apartment houses had been washed away or collapsed. Well, that thought was short-lived, for very soon after that the BNSF dispatcher got on the radio talking to "Amtrak engine 47". I suddenly felt sick to my stomach, and as I continued listening I began to realize what had happened.

Our city of Kingman has been lambasted the past couple of years by ignorant news media and attorneys for something no one has control over, since all cities and towns have these same problems. However, we did well on Aug 9. By 9am, a little over three hours after the derailment of the **Southwest Chief**, all passengers had been removed from the train and transported either to medical facilities or to the junior high school. Not bad. I really feel that our police, fire and disaster training have paid off. We learned the hard way after the propane tank car blew up in July, 1973.

Most of this has already been reported in the media, so I won't repeat that. I would like to say that the Quality Inn offered free lodging for those passengers who wanted it, and Amtrak is having a cookout, and invitations have been mailed to local organizations and individuals who helped out. This will occur sometime in September.

My wife and I drove out Highway 66 to the derailment site after lunch, and for a retired railroader it was a disturbing sight. The first three units were separated in an easterly direction from the train, but they were on the tracks and spaced out. The last unit was derailed along with the rest of the passenger equipment, with its nose pushed against the diaphragm of the baggage car. RTN's article mentioned the third unit being derailed. If it had been, they had re-railed it, and all the units except the last were switched into a spur or siding while we were there. The distance from the highway to the tracks is more than the reported 150 feet. With the rainfall we had had that night and until later that morning at least, no vehicles could reach the wreck.

According to what I heard on the scanner, the seriously injured went out by stretcher and then by helicopter and ambulance. All others used their own legs. And, yes, the Boy Scouts were a godsend. I understand some of them were from the Bay Area and going to a jamboree in New Mexico. What a way to earn a badge!

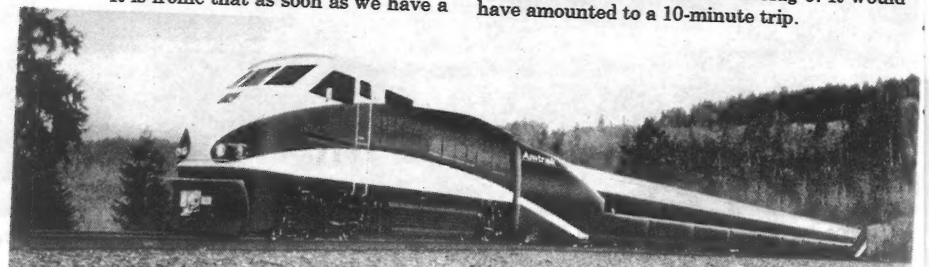
Some active employees of the railroad told me that this particular bridge and one other were the only two that did not have high water block indicators. And it was brought out later in the local paper that there were stock ponds near the wash, and it's a possibility that they broke, and with that additional water the bridge gave in. I noticed a lot of cement and other debris on the far side of the highway bridge. According to the local weather report, we had received 1 ½ inches of rain that night, but that measurement was at the airport. That is a lot of rain for the desert

to receive in a short time, so the results are flash floods.

By mid-afternoon, the heavy equipment started showing up, and when we went back out to the scene on the 10th, the sleepers had been moved to another siding, and all equipment was clear of the new track, and traffic was starting to move. I never got back out there after that, so I don't know when the equipment was moved.

It is ironic that as soon as we have a bad situation, all of a sudden, the BNSF decides to put out speed restrictions during flash flood warnings. Do you suppose the NTSB gave them a little "encouragement"? If I remember correctly, when I was working, we had speed restrictions out during similar situations.

I am leaving Labor Day on train 4 for Chicago and then to New York State. I am grateful that I didn't leave on Aug 9. It would have amounted to a 10-minute trip.



WEST COAST REPORT

Shown above is an artist's drawing of a new Talgo train in production for the State of Washington and Amtrak. Last summer those two entities ordered three Talgos—Amtrak one and Washington two. The trains are expected to debut as Amtrak's **Cascades** in late 1998. They will replace existing trains on daily Seattle-Portland, Seattle-Vancouver BC and Eugene-Seattle service. The trainsets cost about $10 million each. Amtrak's funds came from their FY96/97 capital budgets. The cost of maintaining and operating the trains will be covered by revenues and by Amtrak, Washington State and Oregon.

A **BART strike** appeared likely after two unions late on Sep 4 voted against BART management's "final" contract offer. A strike could begin the morning of Sep 7, but unions and BART management said they would continue to negotiate.

The Coast Starlight, leaving Seattle Aug 23, derailed its lead locomotive just north of the Portland station. The loco was removed and replaced by a freight engine, with a delay of 3 ¼ hours. The train continued on, until between Chemult and Klamath Falls the trailing engine, F40 #367, ran out of fuel, thus cutting off all head-end power for the train. The freight engine managed the train alone until Marysville CA, where the Amtrak engine was refueled. At Roseville the freight unit was removed and F40 367 took the train to Oakland all by itself. There, California engines C2006 (F59PHI) and C2051 (P32-BWH) were added. The train was 10hrs, 14mins late into Emeryville and finally reached L.A. at 6:31am on Aug 25, 9hrs, 31mins late. The through cars to San Diego did not operate, as the train had to be turned to become train 14 of Aug 25.

In late August crews were removing the ex-Santa Fe second district passenger line in the median of the 210 Foothill Freeway east of Pasadena. (The right of way from L.A. to the 210 median near Seirra Madre Blvd will become L.A. Blue Line rapid transit; bridge strengthening along that route is almost complete, and also the double-tracking of the Arroyo Seco bridge.)

The line from Chapman to Arcadia was pulled up within the past few weeks and in late Aug crews were removing the overpass for the Santa Fe tracks across the eastbound lanes of the freeway and on to Arcadia. (Until very recently, the block signal in the center of the freeway displayed red, even though trains had not used the line for two years or more.)

From the Arcadia depot site to the Claremont area the railroad is owned by Metrolink but served by a daily Santa Fe local freight out of Kaiser. Metrolink ran San Bernardino-Arcadia special trains for the Rose Bowl this year on this route. From Claremont to San Bernardino, the former second district is now the route of Metrolink San Bernardino Line trains.—David Busse.

San Joaquin 712 Aug 31 hit a double tractor-trailer carrying pistachios. The truck driver was killed and 20 or more passengers injured, with 10 hospitalized. The truck diesel tanks caught fire. Train 714 picked up train 712's cars.

A South Lake Tahoe man, Gunnar Henrioulle, owns nearly two dozen PCC cars that he is hoping may be used for a Lake Tahoe light rail system. Two of the ex-San Francisco cars are being welded together to form a double-ended car that would not need to be turned. Work is being done by inmates at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center. They are paid a minimum hourly wage for their work. A recent report said that Henrioulle has invested $130,000 of his own in the equipment, and hopes to break even if a light rail service does indeed start up in the Tahoe area. The welding and refurbishing of the cars has taken almost a year, and should be finished by year's end. The work is costing over $20,000, and the double-ended car will still need some body work, such as new windows and a new interior. Henrioulle has yet to convince local officials that such a transit system should be initiated, although back in 1994, when he bought the cars, a light rail transit study for Tahoe was in progress.

●●●

CAPITOLS TO THE STATE FAIR

I went to the California State Fair by Amtrak on Sat., Aug 16. the Thruway bus from Sonoma County to Martinez was 18mins late at pickup points, but on time in Martinez. **San Joaquin** train 712 was early into Martinez, arriving just 8mins after the bus. **Capitol** no. 722 to Sacramento was likewise on time.

Upon boarding the **Capitol**, we discovered a very full train. With a revenue seating capacity of 356, plus non-revenue diner seats, and a passenger count of over 500, according to the conductor, the train was clogged with people sitting on the staircases, on tables and on luggage which they had piled in the aisles. And these were the lucky ones. The others had to stand all the way to Sacramento. Arrival was delayed slightly when one impatient passenger used the emergency door control to open the doors before the train had reached the platform in Sacramento.

The Thruway bus to the State Fair carried about 40 passengers, and dropped us at the main gate exactly on time.

The State Fair and Amtrak have their act together this year. Whereas in 1996 it took 20mins to figure out how to exchange the Amtrak coupon for an admission to the fair, this year the coupons were simply dropped into the same hoppers as regular State Fair admission coupons.

After a 6-hour stay, we filed back onto the bus for the return to Sacramento. To our surprise—but not the driver's, as he seemed to expect it—we had a lot of different people who had apparently stayed the night and gone to the fair for two days.

Boarding at Sacramento was accomplished quickly, but once again there were insufficient seats to accommodate all the passengers. The conductor did not help, announcing that the lower level was restricted to elderly and handicapped only. He relented when he realized how full the train was, but still announced that if he needed the seats for elderly and handicapped, he would have to unseat passengers. We gave up our seats at Suisun-Fairfield to a lady who was both elderly and handicapped, but not at the behest of the conductor, who was nowhere to be seen. We stood the rest of the way to Martinez.

The bus ride involved a transfer in Vallejo, caused by an overflow situation on the midday bus to the North Coast area, and a bus shortage brought on by a fatal head-on collision on Aug 15 near Sonoma, involving a Thruway bus. (Fortunately, there was only one injury on the bus, but the driver of a car that had crossed the center line was killed.)

Many people asked why Amtrak California could not add an extra car to accommodate the load. The **Capitols** which serve the fair, train 722 in the morning and 727 in the afternoon, use different trainsets, and so would require extra cars on both trains. On this date, **San Joaquin** #712/717 also had a large tour group to Yosemite, so it ran with seven cars instead of the usual five, making no cars available for the **Capitols** (the decision was made favoring the longer-haul revenue, according to Arthur Lloyd, who was also on board our train).

Crew members on the Sacramento-bound train also said that the bookings for the State Fair bus did not indicate the need for added cars. But this failed to take into account the large number of passengers who were met in Sacramento by friends and relatives, who then drove to the fair, thus swelling the passenger count without showing up on the State Fair bus. Amtrak California's Kids-Ride-Free promotion must also get much credit for sharply increasing patronage.

It was gratifying to see the demand for train service on a route that Amtrak had threatened to jettison a couple of years back. What was unsettling was the impression that the over-full train made upon a lot of first-time and infrequent riders. I would hope that many who had to stand would not just decide to drive the next time they have to go to Sacramento. —Gene Poon.

Aboard the The First Front Range Thruway

By Jon Esty and Robert Rynerson

This is an account of the first ever Amtrak Thruway bus trip from Denver to Raton and return. Two ColoRail board members, Jay Jones (also a NARP board member from Region 10) and Jon Esty (ColoRail's President), made the day trip, continuing on Amtrak's **Southwest Chief** to and from Las Vegas NM, on June 23.

ColoRail members got up early to see the inaugural departure, and after a round of photographs in front of Denver Union Station (DUT) on Wynkoop Street, Jay and Jon climbed aboard the 47-seat TNM&O coach and were surprised to find seven other passengers. These passengers had been picked up at the downtown bus station. Five were headed to Colorado Springs and two got off at Pueblo.

Due to the major growth developing in intercity bus ridership, TNM&O decided to make this one of their few Front Range-only runs. It falls into timetable slots in both directions which are not well-covered by their mostly long-haul buses, and it will carry short-haul and connecting bus passengers. It should begin appearing in bus timetables in August and September.

The two had plenty of ColoRail-produced schedules to hand out to the agents at bus stations in Colorado Springs and Pueblo and to post in Trinidad, Raton and Las Vegas MN Amtrak stations.

The trip was really quite pleasant and uneventful. They arrived at Trinidad, where Jay helped the friendly and congenial bus driver, Steve Smith, locate the train station. The unstaffed station was locked, so they surmised the train was on time and proceeded on to Raton. Had the train not been on time, they reasoned that the caretaker would have left it unlocked until the train's passage. The assumption was correct, as they passed the **Chief** climbing the east side of Raton Pass just a few minutes later.

(Note: This is an potential problem for anyone using the Trinidad station as a reverse connection; i.e., using this Thruway bus for Denver-East travel with a stopover in historic Trinidad. The Raton station is open through the day, as it has Santa Fe operations in it.)

The **Chief** arrived slightly ahead of schedule and they bade goodbye to driver Steve, who was going to spend the day in town. A very large contingent of Boy Scouts detrained at Raton, though the Train Chief said there was still some room available at Trinidad. The Raton stop is preferred by Amtrak because there will be more seats available to and from the west during the summer.

Jay and Jon had lunch and detrained at Las Vegas on time. They spent the next 2 ½ hours walking around town. Next to the station is a Harvey House which is in various stage of restoration. Jay thought it would make a good bed & breakfast, so now all he needs to do is convince his wife of this!

Las Vegas is home to New Mexico Highlands University, which has a very attractive campus, and Old Town Plaza with many interesting shops and eateries located around a pleasant, tree-filled square.

The eastbound **Chief** arrived slightly early and waited for time at Las Vegas. This train was quite full (it appeared that all of the first class space was sold). The Colorado pair spent most of their time in the Superliner II lounge until their early arrival at Raton. Driver Steve showed up about 10 minutes later with one bus passenger and asked if the train had come yet. Jon and Jay assured him it had because they had been on it and suggested that in the future he be at the station at the scheduled time. It helps for the passengers to see the bus at the time the train pulls in so they will get the feeling they will not be stranded.

They passed the **Chief** on Raton Pass and arrived well ahead of it in Trinidad.

The return trip to Denver was uneventful, though the passengers witnessed a spectacular electrical storm around Colorado Springs. Arrival back at DUT was at 10:20pm, 10 minutes early.

Travel agents and knowledgeable rail travelers are already digesting information about this return of an old rail-passenger routing in a new form. By linking with the **Chief** in both directions at Raton, or by connecting with the **California Zephyr** overnight in Denver, numerous new routings and stopover alternatives emerge.

A check as of June 30 showed that this new service had passengers projected for almost every trip, although in small numbers. The biggest booking at that point was for over a dozen Amtrak passengers on an early July trip.

ColoRail is supplying hand-out timetables for the "Front Range Thruway" and has made posters for points along the way. For copies of the timetable, write: Front Range Thruway c/o ColoRail, Terminal Annex, PO Box 480452, Denver CO 80248

On To Alaska: The Great Land

By Jack M. Turner

In Part III of this series, the author and his family sail north to Alaska where they enjoy the 49th state's passenger trains.

After spending the morning of Monday June 9, 1997 touring some of Vancouver's wonderful sights, the time arrives to head north to Alaska to travel on three unique passenger rail lines. Holland America's luxurious "Veendam" will be our floating hotel for the next three nights. The "Veendam" is the newest ship in the Holland America fleet and carries 1,266 passengers. This year marks Holland America Line's 50th year serving Alaska and the cruise line has six ships serving Alaska this summer. As HAL has 124 years of cruise experience passengers can expect well organized, pleasurable trips aboard its ships.

The captain sounds the ship's horn just after 4:30pm and soon we ease away from the modern Canada Place pier where most Alaska cruises dock in Vancouver. A few minutes later we sail alongside popular Stanley Park and beneath the towering Lions Gate Bridge. The suspension bridge and the land surrounding the harbor resemble the Golden Gate Bridge and the topography of San Francisco's harbor except that the Lions Gate is copper green colored in contrast to the well-known hues of the Golden Gate.

Our cabin is located on the Navigation Deck and contains a queen-size bed and a sofa bed, ample dresser and closet space, a television, a bathroom with tub and shower, and a private verandah beyond a sliding glass door for viewing the passing sights. The square footage is roughly the size of three deluxe bedrooms on a modern passenger train.

The relaxed pace of the cruise ship is one that would certainly appeal to any railfan as the "Veendam" gently plies the waters of the Inside Passage en route to Alaska. The ship has two swimming pools, one of which has a retractable roof that keeps it comfortable in the cool Alaskan region. There are numerous lounges for socializing by day and dancing at night and even a library for those wishing a few quiet moments with a book. The ship's fantail, located just a few steps from our cabin., is my favorite hangout as it is an ideal spot to view the passing scenery and is fairly well sheltered from the breeze created by the "Veendam"s movement.

Shipboard meals are legendary and the "Veendam" proudly carries on that tradition in its two-tiered Rotterdam Dining Room. The variety of meal choices can be overwhelming and each selection is a delight. Aside from the traditional three meals, there is a midnight buffet and several snack opportunities throughout the day. As much as anything, we enjoy our server "Harry" and our busboy "Harry" who pay special attention to our son John and tell him to call them "Red Harry" and "Blue Harry" as those are the colors of their jackets. We also take special delight in listening to a. staff member as he strolls through the ship announcing meal sittings by playing a melody on a set of chimes much like railroading dining car crews did in a bygone era.

Following dinner each night, there are excellent shows in the Reuben's Lounge. The first night's show consists of a song and dance routine featuring many oldies songs fitting the dance theme of the show. The next night's show entitled "Could It Be Magic" is even better as magic illusions were performed to the accompaniment of song and dance.

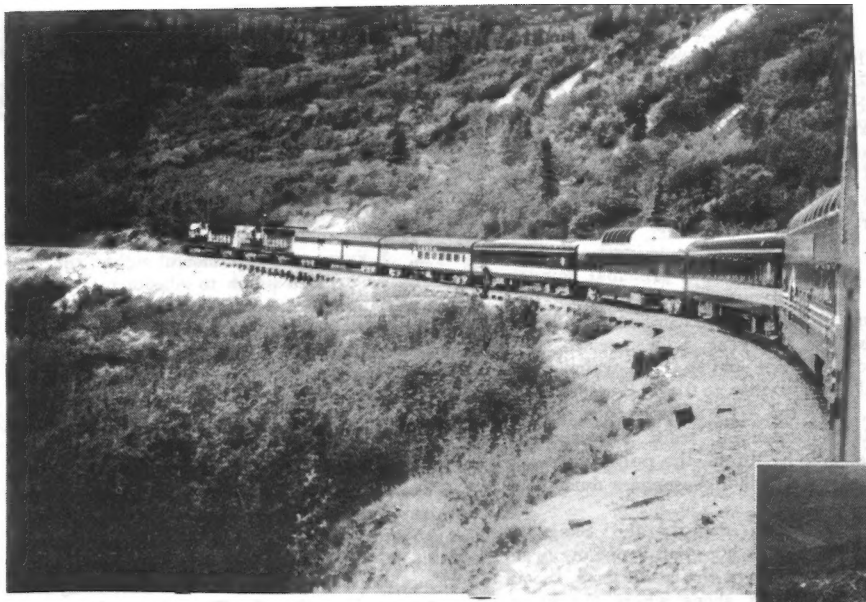
Earlier, as the "Veendam" sailed through the Queen Charlotte Strait and headed toward the Dixon Entrance on our second day aboard, John enjoyed several "Club HAL" activities offered at no charge for young passengers. Included were a. kids' ping pong tournament, golf putting, and arts and crafts. Best of all, a kids' dinner with the ship's crew followed by a movie and popcorn, kept the younger set entertained while mom and dad enjoyed dinner on formal night dressed in their finest attire. Club HAL is a new addition on the Alaska cruises and is a wonderful opportunity for kids to enjoy a variety of activities.

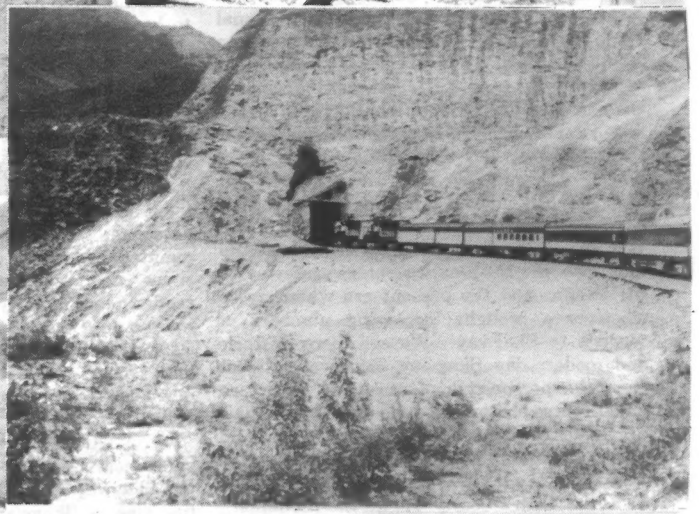
On day three we sail through waters closely surrounded by snow capped mountains. For two hours those of us on deck are captivated by numerous whale sightings as humpback whales breach the waters and at other times dive with their signature tail fluke visible just before they disappear beneath the sea. We spend the afternoon in port at Juneau where we especially enjoy viewing Mendenhall Glacier and browsing through the souvenir shops that are plentiful in downtown Juneau. This linear city is the capital of Alaska and is unique as it is accessible from the outside world only be sea or air.

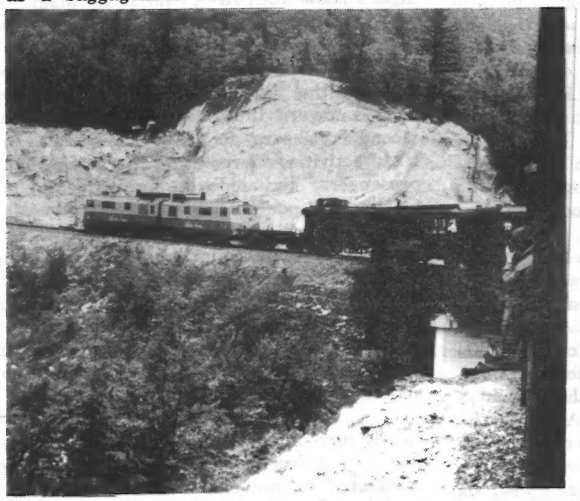
We leave the "Veendam" at Skagway on the morning of Thursday June 12. Skagway traces its history to the Gold Rush era and is celebrating the centennial of that event this summer. This afternoon we will encounter one of our Alaskan objectives, a ride on the White Pass & Yukon narrow gauge route. However, first we have an appointment for a ride on the Skagway Street Car Company.

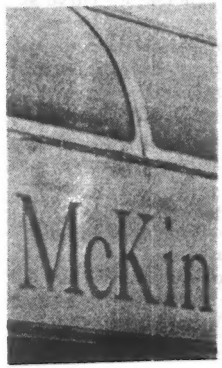
"Hello, and welcome to Skagua" states a Martin Mull lookalike dressed in a black suit and bowler hat straight out of the Gold Rush era. "My name is Steve Hites and I am your guide for today's tour. The natives named this place Skagua which stood for"rainy, cold, windy, nasty, terrible place." The Chinook winds that blow in the winter no doubt spurred that name, but in the summer the town is a pleasant port of call for the crowds that call upon the small southeast Alaska city aboard cruise ships and Alaska Marine Highway ferry boats.

For the next couple of hours we are captivated by Hites as he takes us on a tour of Skagway in his 1927 Dodge convertible. We learn that Hites came to Alaska out of high school in 1972 and persisted until he got a job as a baggageman with the White Pass &









Top center: Alaska Railroad equipment precedes the "McKinley Explorer" full-length domes ridden by the author. All photos by the author. Above: A White Pass & Yukon train bound for Fraser BC tackles the steep line to White Pass Summit on June12. Above center: Holland America Westours' "McKinley Explorer" full dome car 509 "Chena" typifies tastefully decorated equipment used on the Fairbanks-Anchorage train. Top right: The northbound Anchorage to Fairbanks train is seen from the southbound "McKinley Explorer" on June 15. Right center: Alaska RR GP40-2s lead the Fairbanks to Anchorage train into a tunnel near Nenana Canyon. Right lower: Holland America Westours' "McKinley Explorer" boards passengers at Denali National Park on June 15. Other passengers had detrained here to overnight in the park.

Yukon Railroad which at the time still operated regular passenger and freight service. Eventually he became a conductor and held that job until the line temporarily shut down in 1982. To passengers, Hites was known as "the singing conductor" as he put many tales of Skagway, and railroading in general, to music.

The Skagway Streetcar Company was established in 1923 by local businessman Martin Itjen to provide a tour to visiting United States President Warren B. Harding. The company was resurrected following 44 years of dormancy by Steve Hites and his wife Gayla in 1986. Today the company does a booming seasonal business that caters to the thousands of cruise ship passengers who visit Skagway each summer. The company owns a fleet of eleven antique automobiles of which seven are White Motor Company National Park Sightseeing Limousines built between 1936 and 1938. These yellow 14-passenger vehicles were used in Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier, and Rocky Mountain National Parks and catered, to a great extent, to passenger train riders visiting those parks.

During our tour we learn that Skagway has enjoyed three boom periods: the Gold Rush period 100 years ago, the World War II period when the U.S. Army basically took over the town as a strategic gateway to the Pacific, and the present era when cruise ships have brought increasing numbers of tourists to Skagway. We see many historic and modern-day Skagway points of interest from the perspective of our Gold Rush era guide. Hites personalizes the tour by telling us the names of local residents whom we pass and a few pertinent facts such as "Her husband worked for the White Pass Railroad."

With a hearty "Ho for the Klondike!", Steve Hites bids us farewell as we prepare for another adventure. Or as he succinctly puts it: "Everyone is looking for gold. As you continue your Alaska adventure, remember; gold is where you find it." For us this tour has been the perfect introduction to Skagway, and the train ride to come. Reservations for the Skagway Street Car Company may be made on board cruise ships serving Skagway or by calling (907) 983-2908.

Following our tour, we cross the street and board the White Pass & Yukon Route excursion train for the 27-mile trip to Fraser, B.C. During the 1 hour, 45 minute trip the narrow gauge rails will climb from sea level to 2,865 feet elevation on an average grade of 2.5%. At its steepest, the WP&Y tackles a 4% grade as it climbs the Skagway River Valley to White Pass Summit.

Construction on the White Pass & Yukon Route began in May 1898 and was completed to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, two years later. For years it was the only link between the port of Skagway, the Klondike mines, and the Yukon. From 1942 to 1946 the railroad was taken over by the U.S. Army which was building the Alaska Highway. Up to 34 trains ran daily during that time. In October 1982 the line suspended operations as an ore mine that was its principal shipper closed. Service resumed on May 12, 1988 in the form of passenger excursions to White Pass Summit. A year later service was extended to Fraser and in 1993 trains were operated even further to Lake Bennett. On July 12, 1997 the WP&Y operated a special Gold Rush centennial train to Carcross, located at mile 67. In all, the railway expects to handle over 200,000 passengers during its 1997 season.

Our train departs the Skagwav depot promptly at 12:40pm after picking up a few passengers right at the cruise dock. Soon we pass the WP&Y shops where the line's impressive fleet is maintained. The White Pass roster includes 15 diesel electric locomotives, a Baldwin 2-8-2 Mikado steam engine, 43 passenger cars, and various freight and maintenance-of-way cars. A half-mile past the shops we pass the Gold Rush Cemetery, resting place of early local residents including notorious Gold Rush gangster Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith who ruled the town and conned many a man before being shot down in a confrontation with Frank Reid in 1898.

At mile 5 we make a big horseshoe curve near Denver and cross the east fork of the Skagway River. A mile later we enjoy a fine view of Skagway, far down the valley as we pass Rocky Point. Our train windows are large enough for viewing the scenery, but camera fans enjoy the open platforms between cars which are available for photography. By mile 14 the scenery has become incredible as we sweep through another horseshoe curve at Glacier Station. We soon pass Glacier Gorge, a 1,000-foot deep gulch that begins right beside the track, and enter a bore through Tunnel Mountain. Beyond the tunnel the train passes Dead Horse Gulch where over 3,000 pack animals perished during the Gold Rush in 1898.

The Canadian border is crossed at White Pass Summit, 20.4 miles from Skagway. Some WP&Y trains reverse directions here; however, our train will continue another seven miles to Fraser, B.C. In a surreal scene, there is a great deal of snow on the ground and a hint of fog hanging over the valley at spots. The topography east of White Pass resembles a lunar landscape with huge boulders dotting the terrain in all directions. After a most exhilarating ride we pull into Fraser where Holland America Westours motor coaches await those of us who are continuing on to Fairbanks.

For information about the White Pass & Yukon Route consult the line's Web site at: www.whitepassrailroad.com or call (800) 343-7373 for reservations.

Our Alaska-Yukon Explorer lounge-coach departs for the Yukon as soon as all of its assigned passengers board. We are quickly told that this is a motorcoach, not a bus. Passengers who slip up and use the "bus" word will be voluntarily assessed a dime for each slip of the tongue and the lucky person who most closely guesses the total at the end of the trip will win the money. This is just one of many games we will play as we spend two and one-half days traveling to Fairbanks.

Our first day takes us to Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon, where we will stay at the Whitehorse Westmark Hotel, owned by Holland America Westours. During the evening we enjoy a rousing vaudeville show known as the "Frantic Follies", which is performed in our hotel's theater. It is still light outside after the show at 10:30pm but fortunately our hotel has heavy blackout curtains that allow sleep as we near the Land of the Midnight Sun.

Departing Whitehorse the following morning, we spend an hour driving through the 700-acre Yukon Wildlife Preserve where bison, moose, elk, musk oxen, Dall sheep, caribou, and a variety of other wildlife roam free. We then join the Alaska Highway for a beautiful trip through the Yukon Territory where snowy mountains and sparkling rivers abound and long Kluane Lake hugs the highway for many miles. At the end of the day we stop at Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory, a tiny hamlet that is referred to as "301 miles to nowhere" during the delightful Rendezvous Dinner Show at our Westmark Inn.

The final day of our journey begins bright and early on Saturday June 14 as we leave the Yukon and enter Alaska a mile out of Beaver Creek. Our Alaska-Yukon Explorer is part of a fleet that consists of 17 articulated motorcoaches that are 20 feet longer than the standard tour bus. The rear section beyond the accordion-like articulating device is much like a passenger train's lounge car as it offers open seating around small tables and an attendant who serves complimentary snacks and beverages.

Like the preceding days, this day passes quickly as the motorcoach is comfortable, the scenery is terrific, and stops are made at convenient intervals. In addition to all of the natural scenery, we enjoy viewing the famous Alaska Pipeline after a lunch stop near Delta Jct. By mid-afternoon we pull into Fairbanks where we will overnight at another Westmark Hotel before returning to the rails for the trip to Anchorage.

We have reached our northernmost point in Fairbanks and we will now head southward aboard the McKinley Explorer, Holland America Westours' name for its luxury dome cars attached to the center of Alaska Railroad's daily summer train to Anchorage. The other passengers in the five McKinley Explorer cars will, like us, enjoy one of many tour options available from Holland America Westours. Most have either cruised from Vancouver to Skagway, and taken a motorcoach tour like we have or have flown into Fairbanks and will embark on their cruise at Seward. Holland America Westours offers over 30 different options for touring Alaska. Information is available through most travel agents.

We are assigned seats in full dome car #551 "Kobuk" which was built in 1954 by the Budd Company for Santa Fe's **San Francisco Chief**. In 1971 the car was obtained by the privately owned Auto-Train Corporation for service through the rest of the decade. The car then spent a few years under the ownership of the Chicago-based Golden Arrow tour company and, later, another owner before being acquired by Westours in 1989. The car was stored until 1993 and then underwent a year of refurbishing in Tillamook, OR before being sent by barge from Seattle to Alaska where it entered service on June 3, 1994.

The popular McKinley Explorer service has resulted in a current fleet of ten former Santa Fe/Auto-Train full domes, all owned by Holland America Westours. The McKinley Explorer cars comprise exactly one-half of the original Santa Fe full dome roster. Thirteen of these cars eventually saw service on the private Auto-Train. The first of these were acquired by Westours in late 1985 and the search for the domes was extensive, as by then the cars were scattered all across the United States. The cars all wear their original Santa Fe car numbers and have been named for Alaskan geographical features.

Our train departs Fairbanks at 8:15am behind a pair of EMD GP40-2 Alaska Railroad engines. This is truly three trains in one as the first five cars comprise ARR's daily summer train followed by the five McKinley Explorer full domes. Bringing up the rear are four Ultradomes owned by Princess Cruises and dubbed The Midnight Sun Express. Access is limited to the appropriate sect ion of the train in which one is traveling.

Just before 10:00am we cross the Mears Memorial Bridge, built in 1923 to

traverse the Tanana River north of Nenana. Our curved sofa seating is at the forward end of the dome and the view is outstanding. Better yet, the stairs to the lower level are close by, which is convenient since vestibule riding is welcomed. The interiors of the domes have been beautifully decorated and each dome has a host or hostess who describes the scenery plus an attendant who serves complimentary snacks and beverages and sells a wonderful variety of railroad souvenirs related to this train. We are amazed by the level of detail as each car carries HO-scale McKinley Explorer dome cars bearing that particular car's name.

Our early lunch seating is called and we head to the dining room located downstairs. The dining room has its own staff and seats 22 at five tables for four and one table for two. The menu is rather limited and meals are not included in the price of Holland America tours but the experience is nonetheless pleasant.

By 11:15am we have entered the striking and rugged Nenana Canyon. The railway twists and turns through the canyon perched above the Nenana River which roars past carrying spring runoff. Passage through the canyon takes but 20 or so minutes but the view still ranks as one of the most spectacular of American river canyons accessible by rail.

Just south of Nenana Canyon the train stops at the Denali National Park station where a strange phenomenon occurs as the train empties out save for a few of us who are continuing straight through to Anchorage. These passengers will visit Denali, then resume their rail journey tomorrow. No sooner does the train empty out than a whole new flock (who came south yesterday) climbs aboard. The entire process takes but 20 minutes, expedited by the experienced train staff and the absence of bulky luggage. Passengers are permitted to carry aboard only small overnight bags that fit below the seats. Larger suitcases are checked in Fairbanks and sent by truck straight to Anchorage.

South of the park the train continues to follow the sparkling green Nenana River and glides past mountains with snow near their peaks and down their sides. Seven miles south of Cantwell we reach Summit, a 2,363 foot divide in the Alaska Range. A few minutes later we enjoy a slow-paced meet with our northbound counterpart and passengers and staff alike exchange pleasantries from the vestibules of the two trains.

The best-known feature of this route is reached at 2:55pm as we cross the 296 foot tall Hurricane Gulch trestle. The 914 foot long trestle was built in 1921 and stands between the communities of Honolulu and Hurricane. A local rail diesel car train will follow us south from Hurricane to Talkeetna, evidenced by backpacks, coolers, and other items stacked beside the track near remote weekend getaways out of our sight.

The remainder of the trip is highlighted by meets with two northbound ARR freight trains, dinner in the dining room, and passing views of Elmendorf Air Force Base just north of Anchorage. We reach Alaska's largest city at 8:00pm and promptly are loaded onto a Gray Line bus for the transfer to the nearby Anchorage Hilton Hotel where we will spend the next two nights.

The name "Alaska" was derived from the Aleut word "Alyeska" which means "Great Land". On Monday, June 16 we will experience some of this great land's grandest sights. The downhill hike from the Hilton to the Alaska Railroad station takes but five minutes. Though it is only 6:00am, the sun has been up for hours. In fact, we have concluded that the only time the sun is not visible as we near the summer solstice is sometime between 1:30 and 3:00am.

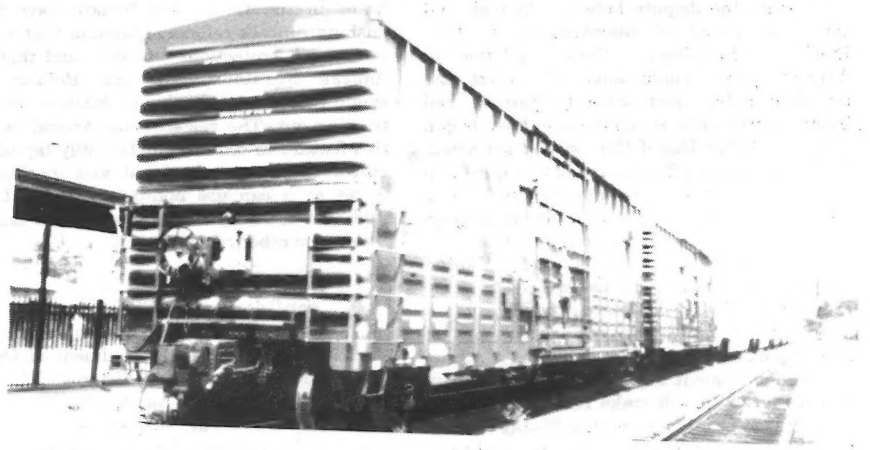
A good crowd has braved the early hour to board ARR's three-car train to Seward. The train consists of ARR GP40-2 locomotive 3009 and two coaches with a diner-counter-lounge car between them. We select seats in the lead coach, car number 208, which was built in Korea in 1989. Our choice proves to be a good one as our car has extra large windows and an informative yet not overbearing car supervisor named Megan McGlothlen who provides interesting information about scenic highlights of the route.

Departing Anchorage, our nameless train passes tidal mudflats and a few minutes later passes Potter's Marsh Bird Preserve. We pass Beluga Point at 7:30am and follow the edge of Turnagain Arm, a large fjord-like body of water that empties into Cook Inlet. High tide this morning was over 26 feet, while low tide will reduce the water level by almost 25 feet. These tides are the world's second highest behind the legendary tides of the Bay of Fundy. Across Turnagain Arm are the snow-covered Kenai Mountains and at some points the mountains will reflect in the calm waters. On the opposite side of the train we spot several Dall sheep at eye level as they lick salt on rocky crags near the tracks.

The train passes through Girdwood at 8:10am and 4,000 foot tall Mt. Alyeska appears on the left. The mountain is home to the state's largest ski resort and is part of the Chugach Mountains. Ten miles to the south

(continued on page 22)

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



Those green boxcars: The photo above shows new green Amtrak express boxcars on the rear of the eastbound **Sunset** at Tallahassee FL in late July (photo by Jack M. Turner). The FRA in late Aug imposed a rest-riction on Amtrak, limiting the operation of baggage, mail and express cars to the front of each passenger train. It was at first believed that the restriction was in response to the de-railment of the **Southwest Chief** on Aug 9. However, it proved to be because of problems activating brakes under some conditions from the rear of the train. This problem was soon resolved, apparently by substituting some freight components onto the cars, and the order was rescinded.

It had been common practice in the NE Corridor to run one MHC car on the rear of NortheastDirect trains, and to run the Boston baggage car on the rear of the **Lake Shore Ltd**. Long distance trains **Southwest Chief, Capitol Ltd, Empire Builder** and **Three Rivers** all operate strings of express cars on the rear. The dark green boxcars in the 70000 series lack HEP lines and an auxiliary air brake reservoir line, and can only be used on the rear of trains.

The ruling was probably rescinded in late Aug, as train 5 of Aug 26 was seen with an MHC and baggage car on the head end and two green boxcars on the rear, the first such consist since Aug 20, when Amtrak began observing the order. Also, train 21 the **Texas Chief** of Aug 26 had green boxcars 70020 and 70003 on it.

Amtrak Intercity head Mark Cane resigned about Sep 3 or 4, and has been replaced temporarily by Lee Bullock.

Amtrak has opened up reservations for the **Texas Eagle** through July 1998, bringing it into line with other trains for the first time in over a year. As noted in the letter on p. 21, Amtrak is lengthening the train's trip time with the Oct 25 timetable change. While the new schedule is still only tri-weekly, Arkansas rail supporters, who have been on the cutting edge of efforts to save the train, seemed not displeased with Amtrak plans, saying that "Amtrak management seems intent on increasing frequency as the express business grows, and indeed the revision of the **Eagle's** schedule was a result of expected changes in train consist".

California Gov. Wilson on Aug 18 vetoed several items in the state budget, including $2 million to increase **Capitol** service from four trains to six a day and to run trains between Sacramento and Stockton to connect with the **San Joaquins**. However, he said he favored the funding, but that it would not be needed until negotiations with UP over track improvements were completed. Train Riders Assoc. of Calif. reported that what Wilson doesn't seem to know is that the Capitol Corridor Upgrade agreement with UP allows up to 10 intercity trains to run without further improvements. TRAC pointed to Wilson's "antipathy towards rail". Because of this and various stumbling blocks, the transfer of the **Capitols** to BART seems stalled.

Albuquerque NM will get a new intermodal terminal, to include Amtrak. The Federal Transportation Administration on Aug 19 released $3.7 million for that project, to replace the old Santa Fe station that burned down four years ago.

Presidential Emergency Board of three members was named by President Clinton on Aug 21 to look into the dispute between Amtrak and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees. In doing so, Clinton said that an Amtrak strike would adversely affect the traveling public and severely hamper rail freight movements. A strike could have begun just after Labor Day if Clinton had not acted. A 30-day cooling-off period was to expire Sep 4. The timing of his announcement was apparently done so that two 30-day periods which began then would end about Oct 20, while Congress is still in session. If Clinton had waited until around Labor Day to name the Board, the 60-day period would end in November, when Congress might be out of session and unable to vote on ending a strike. The announcement begins a 30-day period in which the Board will make recommendations, and that is followed by another 30-day cooling-off period. At the end of it, Amtrak might put new work rules into effect and the union might call a strike. Quick intervention by Congress could follow such an action.

Rail labor was highly critical of President Clinton's actions. UTU president Charles L. Little on Sep 2 issued a statement calling for an investigation of Amtrak's internal management operations by the OMB, the GAO, the Inspector General, the Senate Commerce Committee and the House Rail Subcommittee.

He complained that "Amtrak is asking for givebacks and concessions from labor while it has wasted millions of dollars on buyouts, consultants and management pay raises" and said that UTU workers and other rail labor workers have been working without a contract for over two years.

In addition, Little said he is building a coalition in Washington to help break the Amtrak impasse: "We have a narrow window of opportunity to get Amtrak back on the right track. We need to get the $2.3 billion Amtrak funds released without anti-labor strings attached. UTU has stepped up to the plate to get this done, and now Congress and the American public know it is Amtrak that is stalling and making excuses."

The release pointed out that Republicans in the House and Senate have been pushing Amtrak reform legislation that would remove job protections for labor, and that the Amtrak Reauthorization and Reform Act would eliminate Amtrak's prohibition on contracting out. The release said Amtrak wants this feature in order to "potentially lay off its entire clerical, track signal and mechanical forces so it can use non-union labor." Little said that the UTU is opposed to this bill for "these and other reasons".

A confidential FBI memo has reportedly named a suspect in the **Sunset Limited** derailment of Oct 9, 1995 southwest of Phoenix AZ. That derailment, caused by vandalism, killed one and injured 78. The suspect is said to be someone from outside Arizona. The memo was accidentally faxed to a number of news organizations, none of which apparently released the name of the suspect, which was given in the memo.

The Wabash Corporation, maker of standard and customized truck trailers, has received an order from Amtrak for over 275 RoadRailer trailers along with high-speed truck assemblies. The company said Amtrak will use the equipment on its "high-speed passenger trains". By this term the company apparently meant regular Amtrak trains. The equipment is to be delivered later this year.

Senator John Chafee (R-RI) has pledged to work toward getting Amtrak access to the $2.3 billion in capital funding by seeing Amtrak's reform bill passed. Chafee said that Amtrak "must act like an efficient, competitive business to succeed—and that's what Congress will attempt to do this fall." His statement was issued Sep 2 as Congress returned to work. At the same time, Senate Majority Leader Frank Lott (R-MI), who also supports these pieces of legislation, said that the Amtrak authorization bill is one of the more difficult issues Congress must face this fall.

Reporting on the revenue and ridership results of its third quarter of the fiscal year (Apr-Jun), Amtrak said Aug 21 that ridership increased 2.9% compared to the same period of 1996, and that revenue was up 6.8%, from $220.5 million in 1996 to $235.6 million. These improvements were attributed to more frequent service on some routes. Metroliner ridership was poised to reach an all-time high thie year, and was up 4%. Some of the largest changes in ridership of various routes were on the **Coast Starlight**, up 22%, the **California Zephyr**, up 34.5% (due to increased frequency) and the **Piedmont**, up 60%, while ridership was down 21% on the **Pennsylvanian**, 21% on the **Sunset Limited** and 12% on the **Texas Eagle**.

Amtrak said that the Intercity Business Unit had strong revenue increases of 8.1% in the third quarter.

The NE Corridor saw ridership increase 2%, from 2.78 million to 2.84 million. NEC revenues increased 5.9%, from $114.5 million to $121.2 million.

Amtrak West had a 12% increase in ridership, with significant ridership increases of 32.6% for the **San Joaquins** and 25% in the Pacific Northwest Corridor. Revenue rose 6.8% from $17.7 million to $18.9 million.

Said Amtrak president Tom Downs, "We believe the improvements demonstrate our determination to make this railroad free of federal operating support by 2002. However, only a successfully enacted federal authorization bill will allow Amtrak access to a capital account that will result in a cost-efficient passenger rail system that most countries enjoy."

Federal RR Administration in late August announced an exhaustive system-wide inspection of the Union Pacific, the nation's largest freight railroad, because of a series of recent train wrecks that have killed seven people and caused millions of dollars in property damage. FRA administrator Jolene Molitoris met with UP president Jerry Davis for three hours on Aug 27 to discuss safety on his railroad. Said Molitoris, "Our investigation of recent collisions on the UP Railroad has led us to believe there are critical safety deficiencies present in some locations and immediate action across the entire UP system is necessary." Federal and state examiners are doing round-the-clock inspections at key UP locations such as Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Kansas City and the Omaha headquarters of the railroad.

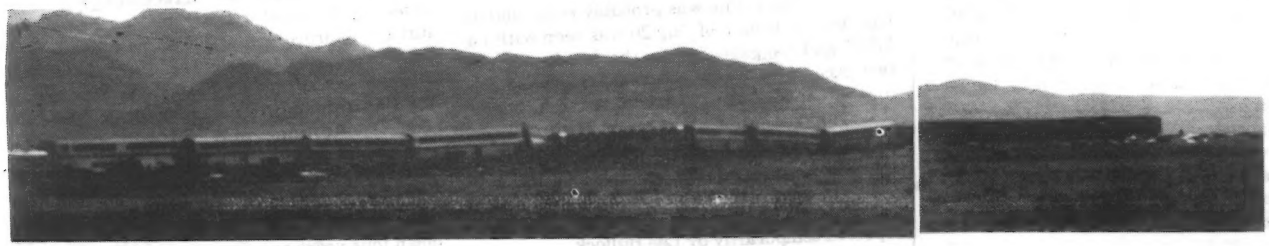
Some recent collisions prompting this inspection: June 2, Devine TX, two UP freights collided head-on, killing two crew and two stowaways; July 2, Kenefick KS, a freight in a siding and a passing freight collided, killing one engineer; and Aug 21, Fort Worth TX, four unattended locos broke loose and ran at 60mph, colliding head-on with a freight, killing the freight's engineer and engineer pilot.

Amtrak trains use UP tracks extensively.

The Channel Tunnel was closed for an hour Aug 20 after two freight trains set off fire alarms. The alarms were found to be false ones and the tunnel was re-opened. Passenger service suffered four-hour delays. The freight trains were evacuated and searched.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"It is unfortunate that the number of highway fatalities stubbornly remains at such a tragic and unacceptable level. We need a concerted effort by government, law enforcement authorities, industry and the media to remedy this state of affairs."
—National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Jim Hall commenting on his agency's Sep 2 release of 1996 auto accident data.



At left is pictured Amtrak train 4, the **Southwest Chief**, at Walapai, Arizona on August 9, about nine hours after its derailment. At the far right are seen the material-handling cars and at the far left is visible a portion of the baggage car that was just behind the locomotives. Photo by Robert H. Heuerman. See page 7 for article and another photo.

News in this issue is updated through Sep 4.

RAIL FANTRIPS

EXCURSION OF THE MONTH

Apr 4-6, 1998: Chattanooga Choo-Choo, Orlando FL to Chattanooga TN. Amtrak Superliners on rare mileage to Choo-Choo Holiday Inn in Chattanooga. Steam trip on Tennessee Valley Railroad while there, $799 all-inclusive, double-occupancy. Call American Rail Tours at 407-677-6366 for res/info.

Oct 11 or Nov 1: Autumn Leaf Rambler 3.5-hr RT Dillwyn-New Canton VA. $16, child $9. Box lunch $6. Limited seating, 1st come 1st served, a/c coach open-window coach or open air cars. Rain/shine. Phone 231-4324 Sun-Thu 7pm-9:30pm. Write Old Dominion NRHS, Box 8583, Richmond VA 23226.

Sep 27-28: Gateway Western. Ex-GM&O route of doodlebugs K.C.-St Louis. $895 incl accommod. on Fri eve before departure. Roomette $100 extra. Priv cars *Caritas, Cimarron River & Pine Tree State*. High Iron Travel Corp, Box 50116, Minneapolis MN 55405. Ph 612-922-7259 for cr. cards.

Oct 4 or 5: Picnicker excursion & fall color tour, Howell-Cadillac MI, intermed. stops. Train incl open window coach, round obs car. 4 departures ea day. Fare $39-79. Ph 800-594-5162 to order. Write Bluewater Mich. NRHS, Box 296, Royal Oak MI 48068-0296.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Excursion of the Month appears once a month, in alternate issues. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA or E-mail to rtn@trainweb.com or rtnews1@ix.netcom.com

CARS & CONSISTS

***Consist of Canadian** that derailed Sep 3 near Biggar, Sask. (see p. 6): engines 6437 & 6447 (F40s); cars 8607 baggage, coaches 8502, 8121 & 8115, diner "Champlain", Skyline dome 8502, sleepers "Bayfield Manor", "Dufferin Manor" & "Stuart Manor", Skyline dome 8501, sleepers "Rogers Manor", "Drummond Manor", "Hearle Manor" & "Amherst Manor", Skyline dome 8510, sleepers "Grant Manor", "Chateau Radisson" & "Monck Manor", dome-obs-lounge "Prince Albert Park".

***Great American Station Tour Special**, Seattle Aug 8: engines 1 (P42) & 395 (F40); cars 1708 express baggage, Superliner II 39044 transition dorm slpr, 21044 Amfleet I display coach, 10030 "Mountain View" ex-GN Great Dome full-length lounge, 44695 Amfleet I NortheastDirect coach, Amfleet I business car "Beech Grove".

***American Orient Express** cars on Seattle King St Station stub tracks 3&4 Aug 8: "Berlin", "Rocky Mount", "Montecito", "Zurich" (slprs), "Chicago" diner, "Pacific Star", "Grand Canyon" & "San Antonio" slprs, "New York" parlor car, apparently ex-GN "Mountain" series observation, slprs "Paris", "Washington" & "Vienna", "Seattle" (ex-UP coach), slprs "Istanbul" & "Monte Carlo".

***Coast Starlight**, train 11, Seattle Aug 8: engines 328 & 384 (F40s); cars 1211 baggage, Superliner IIs 39035 transition dorm-slpr, sleepers 32110 "Tennessee", 32117 "Wisconsin" & 32091 "Minnesota", Pacific Parlor car (Hi-level lounge) 39972, 38057 diner, 33031 lounge, 34134 coach, 34515 coach with children's playroom, coaches 34109, 34111 & 34114. There is no more Portland set-out car; all coaches now go through Seattle to Los Angeles. —Rocky Shay.

***Empire Builder**, train 8/28, Havre MT Aug 31: engines 807 & 818 (P40s from #28 from Portland), 13 (P42) & 830 (P40, both from #8 from Seattle); 1736 "Amtrak Express Baggage" & "United States Mail", Superliner II 39046 transition dorm-slpr, Superliner slprs 32060 & 32032, diner 38014, coach 34020, coach with smoking room 31527, lounge 33010, coaches 34044 & 34099, slpr 32012, MHC 1505, Amtrak express boxcar 70035. (Last 4 psgr cars from #28. Train ar St. Paul Sep 1 35mins early; amazing what 16,000hp can do!)—Andy Selden.

***Quebec, North Shore & Labrador** unnumbered train, Schefferville, Quebec, July 4: RDC coaches 6203, 6115 & 6121, dome 13510. —Stanley D. Crews.

***Crescent**, train 19, Newark NJ Aug 12: engine 602 (E60); cars 1509 MHC, 1170 bag, 2432 "Pacific Waves" crew-dorm, 62000 "American View" & 62018 "Meadow View" Viewliner slprs, diner 8524, lounge 28002, coaches 25041, 25071, 25027 & 25101, 1267 bag-express. (25027 is painted similar to Amfleet I, with its no. on a plate centered on car sides, not at car ends above striping. The opposite occurs on Amfleet I 21085. Why?).—Jim Langan.

THE OPEN VESTIBULE

Jack Turner's comments about US Customs (RTN 571) bring back an experience I had in 1978. I had flown to Buffalo NY and taken a bus across the border to Niagara Falls VIA Rail station, intending to take a short round-trip excursion on Canadian National steam locomotive 6060, before taking a VIA Rail RDC to Toronto. I returned from the excursion and asked the agent if there was any space on the steam train, which was returning to Toronto the same afternoon (this was its last day in passenger service before being retired). Much to my surprise, the answer was yes, and the fare was the standard VIA Rail coach fare.

My American Airlines flight had been a red-eye, and I was tired, so with the agent's permission, I found a seat in one of the coaches and took a nap. During the four-hour wait, the scheduled VIA Rail RDC arrived, and the steam train had to back up to allow VIA into the station. This resulted in my coach backing across the Niagara River and back into the USA.

A US Customs agent thought it strange that a Canadian train would be sitting in the USA, so he parked his patrol car next to the train and boarded it to check it out. He was very discourteous and questioned my reason for being on a train which wasn't supposed to be there at all. While he questioned me, the VIA RDC left for Toronto, and the steam train pulled forward, back into Canada. Now, he was stuck. His car was in the USA, and he was in Canada—and now, he was the one in "foreign" territory! Much embarrassed, he had to call his superior to come and pick him off and take him back across the border! To further embarrass him, I identified myself with my badge (at the time, I was a police officer in California), to which his face turned red at the thought of being rude to a fellow law enforcement officer! It seems that US Customs agents still have the same rude attitude...

Gene Poon
Rohnert Park, California

Belief in conspiracies has never been one of my weaknesses. I would not pay a dime or waste my time watching the movie "JFK", but instead agree with Gerald Posner's book "Case Closed" concerning the Kennedy assassination.

But I have changed, thanks to Amtrak's handling of the **Texas Eagle** matter. With the Houston section discontinued, 150 coach seats were lost for sale between Chicago and Dallas, even during the seasonal and summer peaks. Since that unbelievable management decision, they now occur almost daily, none of which in any way are made to increase ridership.

The **Texas Eagle** is the only long-diatance train in the system where sleeper car passengers must walk from the front of the train through the entire train to reach the diner, which is the last car in the 9-car train. Less work for the dining car crew is the reason given.

Passengers at Dallas, both incoming and outbound, must wait an extra 10 mins to board or detrain while the operations people add or detach mail and/or express cars.

During several periods, one could not make advance travel plans because the train was not in the computer inventory. Finally corrected this week (of Aug 25) after a six-month delay.

Several days it did not have sleeping car or dining car service and was coach-only with a snack coach. Ridership, as a result, plummeted.

Of course, the most devastating move has been loss of the through coach and sleeping car to Los Angeles from San Antonio on the **Sunset Limited**. Resumption of service is unlikely!

Ridership is off as much as 100 passengers compared to last year at the peak points. It is off as much as 200 between Chicago and Dallas with the loss of the Houston section, compared to two years ago.

Just when you thought the worst news possible had been released concerning the food service downgrade for all long-distance trains, more bad news for the **Texas Eagle**.

Effective with the fall, 1997 timetable change, the schedule of the **Texas Eagle** between Chicago and San Antonio will be 31 hours southbound and 32 hours northbound. Arrival time at San Antonio will be a customer-pleasing 1:32am. Departing time from San Antonio will be a very marketable 6:30am, if the **Sunset Limited** happens to be on time.

In 1978, after litigation with the ex-Missouri Pacific RR (present owner Union Pacific), Amtrak was finally successful in increasing operating speeds from 60mph to 70 and 75mph on the portion from St. Louis to San Antonio. Before this increase, the overall time from St. Louis to San Antonio was 23 hours and 50mins. The present running time over this segment is 23 hours, only 50mins faster than when placed in service on March 13, 1974. After the new schedule change in Oct 1997, the schedule from St. Louis to San Antonio will be 24 hours and 32 mins southbound. With speeds permitted at 70 to 75mph (79mph is legal under present FRA track and signal

regulations on this entire route), the schedule is going to be 42mins longer than when it was at 60mph over the St. Louis to San Antonio portions of the Missouri Pacific. Is this progress or what?

Give credit to the BNSF. The Fort Worth to Temple portion has remained constant since 1974, never more than 2hrs, 30mins for the 128 miles.

On April 30, 1978, when the speed was increased on the ex-MoPac portion of the run, the overall Chicago-San Antonio trip was made in 27hrs, 52mins. Since that time, 3hrs and 8mins will have been added to the schedule, all but about 30mins of this south of St. Louis on the ex-MoPac segments.

A 6:45am arrival in St. Louis will break the guaranteed connection with train 301 to Kansas City, which leaves at 7:30am. The 2:25pm arrival in Chicago will also break the connection with no. 5, the **California Zephyr**, which is due to depart at 3:05pm. The connection with no. 7, the **Empire Builder**, was already broken with the 1:20pm departure made in the spring of 1997.

In exchange for the $5 million load made by the state of Texas to save the **Texas Eagle**, this is Amtrak's contribution—all the above plus 1:32am arrival and 6:30am departure at San Antonio.

Let me assure Amtrak and all concerned, if UP were permitted 50 hours to get the **Texas Eagle** from Chicago to San Antonio they couldn't collect incentive payments. Ex-MoPac management styles are becoming prevalent at UP.

I was almost fired from Amtrak after less than one year of service as a result of a controversy over this same matter, the speed of operation and schedule of trains 21 & 22. I was quoted in the press accusing the MoPac of deliberately trying to kill the train because of their arbitrary 60mph freight train speeds for Amtrak passenger trains over their entire railroad. A few years later, the man who wanted me fired apologized and said, "John, you were right all along in your statements about the MoPac." Since then, the time negotiated out of the schedule has been given back, plus more.

I now believe that Amtrak, along with the UP, continue to make decisions that will result in the demise of the **Texas Eagle** unless federal and state officials step in and resolve these problems. Amtrak has often claimed that one hour added to the schedule of a long distance train increases onboard crew cost $100,000 per year; add to this the operating crew cost and it runs into big dollars.

Records have been kept over the past years on trains 21 & 22 that show that the present schedule is too slow. As much as 3hrs of dead time is in the present schedule. Arrivals at stations such as Ft. Worth, Little Rock and St. Louis as much as 30mins ahead of schedule are in the record. Arrival at other stations 10-20mins early are recorded. Adding one hour and 30mins to this train is unnecessary and should be protested by NARP, Amtrak and all other interested parties.

John A. Mills
Topeka, Kansas

Alaska (continued from page 16)

we stop to pick up passengers at Portage. The Whittier cutoff, built in 1943, branches off to our left. During the summer months a shuttle train carries passengers and their automobiles between Portage and the port at Whittier, as there is no highway access to Whittier. The line we follow to Seward was built in 1918.

Twenty-Mile Glacier is visible to our left at Portage and a few minutes later we pass through a muskeg region that is a favorite home of moose. Soon we spot our first moose of the day, then note a bald eagle flying overhead. At 8:55am we are passing within 4,000 feet of Spencer Glacier, then travel through five tunnels that lead us through the Placer River Canyon. This canyon is brief but spectacular, as the rails are near the base of the gorge.

Beyond the canyon we pass within 800 feet of Bartlett Glacier, certainly the closest any North American passenger train comes to a glacier. The railway then snakes around a sharp horseshoe curve that takes our train up a 3% grade. The curves afford passengers on both sides alternating looks back at Bartlett Glacier below. Soon the Placer River comes back into view and beaver dams can be seen close by. A nice waterfall on the left is enjoyed by passengers as our engineer slows the train down to a crawl for maximum viewing pleasure.

The rails follow a pass through the Kenai Mountains at Grandview, then offer a fine view of Trail Glacier, an interesting medial moraine glacier with a black streak of rocks down the center. Another muskeg region follows and within a one mile stretch we see five moose including a mother and her offspring. A couple miles later we note a flock

Photo at left: The magnificent Nenana Canyon is the setting as the "McKinley Explorer/Midnight Sun Express" heads south.

of Canadian geese along the shore of a shimmering lake. Photographers capture images of Upper and Lower Trail Lakes with the mountains reflecting in the placid waters as we draw closer to Seward. Our destination is reached at 11:10am and we conclude that this has been one of the best day trips that we have ever taken by rail, as it has featured fantastic mountain, waterfront, and glacial scenery plus abundant wildlife.

Seward is an ice-free port with an average water temperature of 45 degrees (salt water freezes at 28 degrees.) As such it serves cargo and cruise ships and two cruise ships are in port within walking distance of where we detrain. Our plan for today, however, is a sightseeing cruise through the waters of Kenai Fjords National Park.

The 95 foot long Alaskan Explorer, operated b Kenai Fjords Tours, carries up to 149 passengers on a 110-mile, six-hour tour. The boat has comfortable seating in the air-conditioned cabin, as well as copious viewing areas outside on the bow, stern, and sides. During our tour's outbound leg, we sail the length of Resurrection Bay and get a close look at a pair of humpback whales, round Aialik Cape, pause at Three Hole Point, and head up Holgate Arm to the foot of Holgate Glacier. As we approach the glacier, the boat gently breaks through ice that covers the head of Holgate Arm near the glacier . The captain positions the boat for spectacular views as parts of the glacier calve with thunderous sounds.

The return portion of the tour takes us right alongside an island where dozens of stellar sea lions sun themselves on the rocks, and other rocky cliffs that are home to brightly colored birds known as puffins. Sharp-eyed passengers also spot bald eagles, mountain goats, starfish, and sea otters during the tour. While our entire Alaskan adventure has been fantastic, the Kenai Fjords boat tour ranks as the most unexpectedly pleasant part of our travels along with the Skagway Street Car tour. For reservations, contact Kenai Fjords Tours at (800) 478-8068 or consult: http://-www.kenaifjords.com for further information.

Upon returning to Seward, we stroll around the town for awhile and learn about the Alaska SeaLife Center that is scheduled to open in May 1998. The center will conduct marine research and will house numerous habitats where visitors can view native wildlife up close. We return to Anchorage by Gray Line bus and spend a short night at our hotel before catching an early morning Alaska Airlines MD80 flight to Seattle. In a twist of fate, this jittery flyer passes an hour of the 3 1/2 hour flight describing the joys of passenger train travel to our senior flight attendant who was unaware of the scenic rail trips available in the U.S. By the end of our conversation, she seems ready to book a family trip by rail.

Our Alaskan adventure has ended, but there are still many sights to see as we will return to the rails tomorrow in Vancouver. In Part IV of this series, we travel on BC Rail from Vancouver to Prince George, then ride the length of VIA Rail Canada's **Skeena** route.

The author wishes to thank the following persons for their tremendous assistance with the various components of this trip: Noel DeChambeau and Lawrence Dessler, Holland America Line-Westours Inc.; Steve Hites, Skagway Street Car Company Inc.; Pierre Germain, Tourism Yukon; Janet Swanson, Alaska Railroad; and Vickki Malone, Kenai Fjords Tours.